Manage homework like a pro

Middle graders who do well in school generally have one thing in common: They stay on top of their homework. Your tween can use these strategies to manage his assignments successfully.

Make it a priority
Have your child put homework on his calendar and plan other activities around it. To decide how long he needs, he could add time estimates to his planner as he writes down assignments. Examples: “Read chapters 7 and 8 in novel, 30 minutes.” “Find five sources for social studies presentation, 20 minutes.” Over time, his estimates will get more accurate.

Identify what works
Recommend that your tween find strategies and habits that fit him best. Say he finds it easier to work earlier in the evening. He might decide to do harder assignments before dinner and easier ones afterward. Or if he finds his mind wandering, he could take a snack break or walk around the room as he reviews his notes.

Have help ready
Be sure your middle grader knows how to get help easily. Suggest that he put classmates’ phone numbers and email addresses in his contacts. He should also write down teachers’ office hours and keep a list of approved homework-help websites and student portals.

Appreciating differences
While your child may naturally feel drawn to people who are like her, she can broaden her circle of friends—and learn a lot—by getting to know kids who are different from her. Suggest these ideas:

- Encourage your tween to strike up a conversation with a classmate who is learning English and find ways to communicate. Perhaps she’ll shiver and hug herself while saying, “It’s cold out today!” or point to the basketball hoop and ask, “Do you want to play?”
- Introduce your middle grader to other cultures. Suggest that she read fiction and memoirs by authors from other countries. Find music from other cultures to listen to, and attend heritage festivals together. Talk about how the cultures are similar to and different from your own.
Rules that grow with tweens

The rules you set for your middle grader grow and change—just like she does. Use this advice to keep her safe as she becomes more independent.

Let her make a case. Say your tween wants to go to the movies with friends and no adult. Explain your concerns, and together, think of ways to address them. For instance, maybe you could drop her off with her friends, and afterward they have to stay inside the theater until you pick them up.

Q & A

Q My middle grader has more group work in middle school than he did in elementary school. Why is that, and how can I support him?

A Teachers assign group work to help students learn collaboration skills. This prepares them for the future, when they’ll need to team up with classmates in college or coworkers on the job.

You can help by offering to host your son’s group or drive him to meetings. Ask him how it’s going. Is everyone doing their part? If not, help him brainstorm solutions like having group members check in with each other more frequently or setting deadlines to keep everyone accountable.

You might also point out talents your tween has that he could share with his group. For instance, if he has an eagle eye, he might proofread their final paper or poster.

Present yourself well online

As your child approaches the age where he can open social media accounts, talk to him about how to leave a good impression online. Share this advice.

Think about your audience. Have your tween imagine that every post will be seen by someone he admires. Before he posts a video or comments on a blog, he should ask himself if he’d want his coach or his grandpa to see it.

Be positive. Encourage your middle grader to follow the rule “If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all.” It’s a good idea for him to keep complaints to himself and instead offer encouragement and helpful information.

“Like” the good stuff. Putting a “like” on a questionable photo, video, or comment tells others that he’s okay with it. Point out that your child shouldn’t endorse anything he wouldn’t post himself.

Consider a trial basis. Lay out clear expectations for your child, such as seeing a movie you approve of and silencing her phone and obeying other theater rules. Then, allow her to go just with friends once. If she follows the guidelines, she can go again. If she doesn’t, it’s off the table until she shows more maturity.

Note: Let your middle grader know what you won’t compromise on. Good examples include safety rules (like no vaping), going to school every day unless she’s sick, and treating people with respect.